

### **Testimony of Carol Walter, Executive Director**

**RE: H.B. No. 5014, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING June 30, 2012**

#### **Before the Appropriations Committee February 15, 2012**

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony and on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, thank you for your leadership in preventing and ending homelessness in Connecticut.

Connecticut's emergency shelters have run near or over 100% of their legal capacity for more than two years now. More than 13,000 individuals used our emergency and transitional housing programs last year. All of our data and the national research indicate that far more families experience housing instability and homelessness at any time than can be served by our fragile prevention and shelter system -- *an estimated 40,000 families are "doubled up" (staying with family or friend for economic reasons) in Connecticut.*

The good news is that we know how to end homelessness in Connecticut. We have a legislature and administration who seem to understand what it takes as well. We thank the Governor and will speak to his proposals tonight, but we ask that you go even beyond those proposals and add funding for two initiatives that will be key to ending family homelessness.

**1) Increase RAP: housing subsidies are the most effective way to prevent and end family homelessness.** Thousands of families remain on the waiting list for the State Rental Assistance Program with literally no new vouchers available for this general population of our poorest neighbors. Simply providing an additional 100 RAP's next year will likely house more than 300 people who make up the families in these households. . This would stabilize families and can reduce the demand on shelters that are forced to turn away families with young children every day.

**2) Increase funding for the Children in Shelters program,** so that homeless parents can look for housing and work or participate in job training and education. This would make them better able to earn a living and be independent of housing assistance. With additional funds, we could provide licensed care to such families with children up to age 12 who do not qualify for Care 4 Kids.

As for the Governor's initiatives, I offer my testimony in support of three specific recommendations this year:

**Revitalizing Affordable Housing.** Governor Malloy's proposal to rehabilitate state owned public housing can potentially make the largest impact on ending homelessness than any single state policy initiative to date. The key will be assuring that some of the units that come back online are set aside for families and individuals who are homeless. Through Connecticut's 13 local plans to end homelessness we are determined to work with our grassroots networks in communities throughout the state to leverage this promising resource and significantly reduce homelessness in our state over the coming years.

**Supportive Housing.** Governor Malloy's budget contains funds for an additional 150 RAP certificates for scattered site supportive housing. Supportive housing is a successful and cost-effective approach to address chronic homelessness by creating permanent, affordable housing with services designed to support individuals and families who are highly vulnerable, frequently utilize expensive state services such as jail and institutional care, and who have been homeless frequently or for a long period of time.

**State Office of Housing.** Finally, we enthusiastically support the creation of an Office of Housing at the Department of Economic and Community Development which will consolidate all of Connecticut's housing programs as well as homeless services programs under one agency. The move of shelters, transitional housing and supportive service programs which comprise the homeless crisis response system in Connecticut also symbolizes a new and exciting opportunity to move homelessness and its solutions from a public assistance frame to an economic development and income security paradigm where housing crisis and homelessness can be primarily addressed through the creation of affordable housing and jobs.

Today homeless services, prevention, housing and other critical services are spread throughout numerous state agencies or fragmented within several arms of DSS, a single state agency. Through consolidation coupled with the dedicated leadership to be established at DECD, all of our homeless programs, supportive housing initiatives, and development investments can focus on a continuum of needs, and increase our ability to provide individuals and families with appropriate housing options.